



to have enough for all," I said impressively.

"Do you really think that?" asked Mary, doubtfully.

"I don't believe you!" positively asserted Semantha.

"Nobodys ever has enuff of anytings!"

Then we were called. We were young; we were tired; we were ravenous; we trembled like so many hungry young animals. We sat where we were told at the white covered table, that had a scanty green wreath in the centre and within it a glass dish of plum preserves, that threw exquisite dashes of color about five figs and the handful of nuts in a china saucer. Five gingerbread horses, saddled and bridled with white sugar, spelled Semantha unerringly. A big soup-tureen loomed up massively—but, where, with sinking heart, I asked myself—where was my star offering, the celery?

We had grasped our napkins, when a stern "Hem!" from Mrs. Mother caught our attention, and, shamed at our forgetfulness, we bent our heads while the gray haired woman murmured her "For what we are about to receive," and Semantha asked wonderingly, "What does she talk 'bout de Got at meal times for?" No time for explanation—the plates were being passed! Dear Heaven, what has become of the savor of food since that time? We ate first to appease keen hunger; then for the delight of our astonished palates. Presently Mrs. Mother rose to return a moment after bearing the celery—and such a joyous shout welcomed it that I felt I was indeed the benefactor of my chums.

Twice Semantha rose and reached over to replace the fallen saddle of one of her horses, saying "Macht nichts, I'll eat dat horse myself!"

Suddenly a long, forlorn "Moo-o!" sounded from without, and any one who had ever lived on a farm would have recognized at once the note of protest—of distress. Again, louder, longer, "Moo-oo-oo!" Mrs. Mother and daughter Hattie looked at each other, and the former explained, "It's that good for nothin' Dutchman, at the corner of the alley, that's gone and got drunk again, I suppose, and he's left that poor cow out in the yard."

"Und vy shall she holler uf nobody don't hurt her?" asked Semantha.

"She hollers to get into her stall and her straw bed," replied Hattie.

"Poor thing," said Semantha. "I youst know all dat too!"

We sang, we even coaxed Mrs. Mother to quaver a few stanzas about "The bright Juniatta, painted quivers, antelopes, and light canoes," and we sent up a chorus in great shape. Then stories followed, of course, Bible stories, too, old Christmas legends. Mrs. Mother was a Manx woman, and was full of mystic, ancient tales. The blazing eyes of the little German girl seemed ready to jump out of her head with excitement when the tale of the great Angel's sweep down to earth with the wondrous message to the Shepherds was ended. She eagerly said she wished "Dey had caught vun of dem angels und put him in a cage, so dey could hav' a goot look at him in de day light!"

Then Mrs. Mother told the lovely old story of the humble birth of the dear Saviour of men, of the gentle, tired eyes of the oxen and the ass, looking on at the Divine Mystery, and how in memory of that precious night, all the whole world over, the cattle at mid-night of Christmas eve reverently kneel as if in prayer—

Swiftly Semantha broke in with "What an infernals hell lie!"

"Well—I'm sure!" gasped the narrator.

didn't mean dat swear. But uf you vill please tell vy dat Christ com' down out of de sky anyhow—and uf he vas Got alretty, vy was He com' poor instead of rich?"

A startling silence replaced our humble jollity. What a question, and not a class-leader present to answer!

This girl, flushed, excited, waited for information. I looked entreatingly at the life-worn woman who headed the table. With a touch of acerbity, she stated, "He was the very Son of the all-powerful God, and He wanted to save the whole sinning human family."

"Vell," quickly broke in Semantha, "vy didn't He do it up dere, or be rich mans here? Poor mens can't save dere own selves, youst—so vy shall He com' at all out of der Heavens—and vy shall de beasts on der knees go, for seeing a baby?"

I felt the vexed backward shove of Mrs. Mother's chair, and under the table corner I caught at her hard fingers. "Please; oh, please!" I breathed. "The only Bible she ever saw was the one her mother snatched out of her father's hand and burnt." Then, dreading to have our bright play hour end in black sulks, I caught at Semantha's hands across the table, and said: "Semantha, can't you see that the greatness, the glory of Almighty God, would make the poor, suffering sinning people afraid to approach Him, and tell what they had done, and how sorry and sick-hearted they were, too little, too common—"

"Ya—ya! I can see dat!"

"And the lovely, loving Christ understood, and then as now there were more poor than rich, and He hungered for their love and longed for their safety, and



"SHE DANCED AND CAPERED WITH DELIGHT"

He knew that if He lived with them and toiled with them and loved and suffered and was deceived and disappointed just exactly as they were, that they would trust Him, and come to Him and love Him forever, just because they believed He understood.

"How dare you?" exclaimed Hattie.

"To speak so to an old woman," joined in Mary.

"Vy, how old is she den? Vas she mad mit me? Vy, I don't mean notings, only dat vas a big lie some vun told to her. Der cows couldn't know to go to der knees for dat baby Christ!"

"Don't mind," I whispered to our hostess. "She is treated so cruelly; she was never taught anything."

Semantha interrupted here. "If you please, don't be mad mit me; I

And that He might know every need, every pain and every affliction we know, He came on a rush of angels' wings, away from the power and glory of Heaven, to become the feeblest, weakest, most helpless of God's created beings—a little baby—born in direst poverty—"

"Ach! de goot Got! Vat a big, goot heart He have, too—und dat baby! Oh, I never swear no more! But, fraulein, all de same dem cows couldn't know to make of de prays, ven de people don't do it der own selves."

But Mary, Mary the weather-cock, was moved by a wandering spirit of wisdom who mistook her for another, to cry in a loud voice, "Get your guitar, Hattie, and let's try that last chorus again."

"Gently cleave the ambient air,

Safely back our Master bear."

and the joy of its swing put us all right again.

Then we were gently expelled by our hostess, who reminded us of to-morrow's double performance. We came tumbling out into the bitterly cold glory of a magnificent night. A lamp with its green paper shade off, and looking almost immodestly bare in consequence, was held high by the old lady, to light us to the gate, sagging and rope-tied.

Down the snowy street we trotted three abreast, Hattie being at home now. As we were passing a high board fence near the corner, there came a sort of sliding fall against it and a sound that was a sigh, a groan, a snort, all combined.

Three shrieks broke from three frightened girls. We bounded to the gutter, clutched at each other, and shivered. Mary looked as if she would faint. "Don't," I whispered. "Oh, don't!"

Then Semantha straightened up. "Stay you here, my fraulein, I'll see vat dat is!"

"I'll go with you," I quavered.

"You stay youst as I tell you! Uf anyone comes to kill dere, I tell you, and you yell for de police! Now I climb de fence."

She had no gloves so she wrapped her fingers in the corners of her shawl, then drew back, made a little running jump and caught at the top of the fence, hung there a moment, scraping her toes wildly up and down in search of some purchase, found it, lifted herself up and peeped over into the enclosure.

A strong expulsion of breath reached us at the same moment. "Oh, what was it?" Then a cry broke from Semantha's lips, she looked back at us. Under the flood of moonlight her face was marble-white, her eyes blazed, her throat worked convulsively, the coral beads sprang through the air and lay like a pink adder on the walk!

One more glance she gave over there, then hurled herself to the ground, caught each of us by a hand, and in a thrilling triumphant voice cried out, "By Got, it is true! Down on de knees! Down on de knees! Und make de prays; make 'em quick! quick! Youst like de cow over dere makes now!"

Pushed by the wild power of her command, two trembling voices quavered forth on the one side, "Our Father Who art in Heaven," and on the other side, "Jesus, Mary, Joseph—save us!" And Semantha bowed her head and exultantly caught at one word and another.

Then, still holding our hands, she raised us and tip-toed softly away, breathing low, "Und I saw it; I saw it by my own eyes!"

When we parted, she raised a fore-finger and said: "My step-fader shall tells me all vat vas in dat Bible book my mutter burned! Guten nacht, my fraulein!"

Every absolutely real and genuine thing is in a certain degree impressive; and being absolutely and truly a heathen that poor child was impressionable. The cow shortening her rope by repeated circuits of the yard was finally brought to her knees, in sighing surrender—hence Semantha's conversion, and truly in her case seeing was believing.



## The Alligator and the Thick Skin—A Fable

By W. Bob Holland

**A**N ALLIGATOR that had a rind as rough as a newly-plowed field was dissatisfied with the physical aspects of his form.

"Here I am," he said, "a graceful and well-informed saurian, but because of this real alligator skin valise in which I am inclosed I look hideous to the refined eye. It is a shame to put a harveyized coating of armor plate on a defenseless creature and thus handicap him in his efforts to get on in society."

"My epidermis is at least an inch thick in the thinnest spot, while along my ridge pole where those Himalayas appear one would have to bore four inches before arousing my interest. Wood peckers can wear out their bills on me and unless I read about their efforts in the public prints I never know that there is anything doing."

"You do not know when you are well off," declared a bull frog that had listened to the lamentations of the

gator. "That thick rind is really a good institution. It prevents your being troubled by mosquitoes with which this swamp abounds. It also affords you protection from more dangerous but less annoying enemies."

"For the last ten minutes an Englishman wearing a loud hunting suit and eye-glasses has been shooting at you from yonder bank. I have counted twenty-two bullets which struck your hulk and bounded gaily off into the future. Because of your despised envelope the bullets did not even disturb your meditations and unless that Englishman plants one in your eye, which would really be annoying, you are as safe as if you were in a storage warehouse."

"I will make no more complaints," said the alligator. "My skin not only protects me, but it affords amusement to hunters who need target practice."

Moral: Thick skins protect politicians the same way.